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THE MIND OF A MASTER-BUILDER

AN INTERPRETATION OF ST PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

BY THE REV.

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PREFACE

THERE is probably no character in the whole portrait gallery of the New Testament that appeals to us so closely and so constantly as that of St. Paul. And the reason of this is not only, or even chiefly, the amazing success of the Master-Builder; it is even more the intense humanity of the man. It is significant that as it is in his "weakness" that St. Paul "glories," so it is his "weakness" that draws us to him most: the proof that is furnished by every page that he wrote that, for all his greatness, he was a man and a brother.

The following studies are an attempt to show how the principles and the ideals

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of the worker and the personality of the man, his application of the eternal verities of the Faith to the life and problems of the Church, and to the sore needs of the individual soul, come out from a consideration of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

The chapters are the substance of addresses given at Retreats of Clergy in North India in 1910–11. In their final shape, they were written at a time when the writer had no access to books, so that the quotations are for the most part from memory, and may contain verbal inaccuracies. The citations from the text of the Letter are generally given in the words of the Authorised Version, but where it seemed desirable fresh translations have been made.

St. John's College, Agra.

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INTRODUCTION

We frequently get from the Mission Field to-day books of quickening power, produced by the men and women who live in the van of Christ's army, at close grips with the non-Christian forces. Mr. Bernard Lucas, in his *Empire of Christ*, has laid all English-speaking people under an obligation. Mr. Hogg's *Christ's Message of the Kingdom* has been pronounced by a great theologian as the most important work on Theology which has appeared in the last year.

Mr. Durrant's brief book, which is now before the reader, has some of the same qualities as the works of these other Indian missionaries. The subject is trite,

but the message is fresh. It is as if, looking at the millions of India, and holding in his hand the New Testament, the writer realises the significance of the Christian truth, and the power by which it can conquer the world, as we at home hardly do.

Our missionaries go out to win the unchristian world to Christ, but in work like that presented in this little book they react upon the church that sent them and bring it back to Christ, or at least open its eyes to the possession that it may claim in Christ.

The book needs no commendation when it is read. It immediately justifies itself. If any should be induced to read it by these brief words of introduction, I know I shall earn their gratitude.

ROBERT F. HORTON.

HAMPSTEAD.

THE CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

CHAPTER I

THE CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

"All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, whether the world, or life, or death, whether things present, or things to come; all are yours."—1 Cor. iii. 22.

This passage is one of many in St. Paul's writings in which the thought seems to glow and burn. The wonder of the vision bursts on him as he writes. The thoughts are two: the poverty of party spirit and the wealth of the Christian's heritage.

I. The Poverty of Party Spirit

He has been dwelling sadly enough on the state of things in the Corinthian

Church. They had owed much to three teachers, each no doubt with his own special message, some special aspect of the truth that each had particularly emphasised. If preaching be truth through personality, every man's preaching must be distinct and individual. And this Church, instead of thanking God for their riches in this threefold presentation of the truth, had used it as an occasion for breaking up into three parties, each exalting their own teacher at the expense of the other two. The argument that St. Paul uses here is very striking, and just as applicable to-day as it was when he wrote. The partisan, he implies, the rabid member of a particular school of thought in the Church, is no doubt guilty on other grounds; he is also guilty on this: he is deliberately impoverishing himself, signing away his right to part of the

great inheritance of truth. Every teacher, every school that is really of Christ has its own contribution to make to the full-orbed presentation of Christ; and in so far as we are partisans, we renounce all but one small part of that wealth. The true remedy is not to minimise or let go that aspect of the truth for which each party stands, but to recognise that truth is big and that no one school of thought can have the monopoly of it.

But we feel, as we read, that this does not exhaust the meaning of the passage; St. Paul's thought here, as so often in his writings, carried him farther than he knew it would when he began the argument; and from the idea that the Christian is rich in that he is lawful heir to, lawful owner of all the truth that God has revealed to men, there bursts on his view the whole glory of the Christian's

inheritance. That little band of despised and persecuted men, their leaders made "the offscouring of all things, a spectacle to angels and to men," their ranks containing "not many wise men after the flesh, not many rich, not many noble," were heirs to wealth undreamed of; and so he breaks into one of those wonderful exhaustive lists which are such a feature of his style.

II. The Christian's Wealth

We have the feeling in reading this verse that we get sometimes in mountain climbing, when we reach some commanding ridge or crag—the sense of wide spaces, free air, illimitable prospects. Because we belong to Christ, because we are one with Him, because we are joint heirs with Him, all these are ours. "I opened my mouth and drew in my breath."

And first notice that we are reminded here of another passage somewhat similar to this: "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ." A noble thought, but here he seems to have reached a still higher plane. There he pictures all the contents of life as our enemies, trying, though trying in vain, to compass our ruin. Here he rises in a moment of wonderful insight to the higher conception still, that these things themselves are part of our inheritance, part of the great wealth to which we are heirs in Christ. Let us look at the several parts of these riches.

The world. The use of this word in the New Testament is most interesting, and repays the closest study. We

have two main conceptions given to us.

We have first the conception that we associate chiefly with the writings of St. John, the idea of the world as the implacable, though in the long run the impotent enemy of the Church. The world in St. John, Bishop Westcott writes, is human society organising itself apart from God. The New Testament writers had before their eyes a concrete example of the world in this sense in the splendid fabric of the Roman Empire. Strength, magnificence, organisation, law, art, literature, and beauty, forming a whole that dazzled the eyes of the beholder, deliberately shut God out. This is the clear and simple conception of the world which has laid hold of the Christian conscience and imagination. No doubt this is needed still, but we must not

forget the profounder idea suggested here.

In some mysterious sense the world belongs to the Christian in a way that it does not to the worldling, who seems to move at ease among its splendours and to be breathing his native air. What can it mean? I would suggest what may, at any rate, be part of the idea in the mind of St. Paul. Human society, as we know it, is really built upon certain fundamental instincts and needs of human nature—the love of society, the love of beauty, the love of order, the admiration for a splendid organisation, the deep ineradicable longing for happiness. In the world we see these things monstrously perverted: the social instinct run to seed in an endless round of assemblies that have long ceased to be really social; the disciplined subordination where the weak

can rest upon the strong, and the foolish on the wise, deteriorated into a senseless system of etiquette and snobbery and selfish caste-distinction; the love of beauty, as in the decadence of the old Greek world, fastening on the external and physical rather than on the spiritual and internal; the longing for happiness finding expression in a feverish hectic pursuit of so-called pleasure. And from one point of view the Christian can only stand aloof from these things. But in a deeper sense still they belong to him; these instincts are God-implanted. He made us to love order, beauty, society; to admire power, splendour, organisation. And in Him these instincts find satisfaction; there is no longing in our hearts which Christ cannot satisfy, no empty aching place in our life which He cannot fill. "Thine is the kingdom, the power, the glory;"

and because "Thine," ours. In Christ the world is ours; all in it that attracts our truer selves we shall find in Him and in His Church.

Life. This, which in one sense belongs to all, is said here to be in some special sense the possession of the Christian. Life, according to the old often-quoted dictum, is adjustment to environment, the power to draw from our surroundings all that is needed for the full and free development of personality, all that is requisite for complete self-expression.

The longing for life in this sense, the passionate plea that all have the right to live, the craving for this self-expression is at the root of most of the movements in individual and national history, from the prodigal who chafes at the restrictions of home and goes to a far country, to the nation which claims the right to live a

national life. St. Paul has somewhere a beautiful expression, translated in the Authorised Version, "That which is life indeed"; and when he says that life is part of the Christian heritage he must surely mean this: that in Christ we are placed in conditions that are of all others the most favourable for the development of our personality. Not seldom a strong leader, by the very force and weight of his own personality, seems to kill the individuality of his followers. But Christ never did this; even from the brief Gospel history we can see that the disciples were more unlike each other after their three years' association with Jesus than they were before it: that their individuality had grown more marked through their fellowship with Him. Part, then, of the Christian's heritage is this: that he can draw—just because he is so

placed in Christ—from all his surroundings, physical and mental, seen and unseen, all that is needed for the development of the individual self. "By your patience ye shall win your souls;" that is, ye shall become yourselves.

Death. Here, again, something that seems to be the inalienable right of all is said to belong in some special sense to the Christian. What does this mean? It does not mean for a moment that the Christian is the only man who is not afraid of death. There is hardly an emotion in the human heart so weak and fleeting but that it has proved strong enough to overcome the fear of death. Avarice, ambition, duty, patriotism, love, even the spirit of adventure and desire for change, have over and over again mastered that fear. Again, it does not mean that to the Christian alone death

has seemed a boon; while St. Paul wrote, "To depart is better," pessimism, disappointment, weariness, disillusionment have made men of the world in all ages cry, "Death after life doth greatly please." But I think it does mean that to the Christian alone death is the entry into a *fuller* life. Death to the ancient Greek and Roman was a passing into the life of "the Shades"; death to the Christian means leaving the world of shadows and entry into the land of the real. Men of other creeds and other ages have believed in a life the other side, but no one but a Christian could have written "Crossing the Bar," with its central idea that death is the beginning of the voyage, the entry into the trackless ocean of the wider life to be. Nowhere, perhaps, but in a Christian environment could those fine lines have been penned:

"The Master of all good workmen
Shall set us to work anew;
And only the Master shall praise us,
And only the Master shall blame;
And no one shall work for money,
And no one shall work for fame,
But each for the love of the working."

Christ brought "incorruption" to light through the Gospel, the knowledge that no human power, no true human faculty can be taken from us by death. If life belongs to the Christian, so does death. And so the wonderful list of the treasures of the Christian heritage comes to an end. "All things are ours," whether under the conditions that we know now—"things present"—or under the conditions that we shall know then—"things to come"—"all things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

CULTURE AND THE CROSS: A CONTRAST AND A RECONCILIATION

CHAPTER II

CULTURE AND THE CROSS: A CONTRAST AND A RECONCILIATION

"I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."—1 Cor. ii. 1.[1]

The whole of the section of the Epistle, in which the words quoted appear, can be summed up in the title of this chapter, and the thought may perhaps be best considered by thinking first of the two ideals, and then of their reconcilement in Christ.

Practically all through the world's history there have been two apparently irreconcilable ideals that have governed men's living and thinking. We can describe these by various terms, each of

[1] For the whole subject *vide Culture and Restraint*, by Hugh Black.

which perhaps adds something to our understanding of the contrast: self-development and self-denial, self-expression and self-repression, self-limitation and self-expansion, self-realisation and self-sacrifice, Hellenism and Hebraism, culture and the Cross.

I. The two Ideals

The ideal of culture. We need to be careful, I think, lest the unsightly caricatures and burlesques of this ideal should blind us to what is to be said for the ideal itself. We have all been irritated by the absurdities of the camp-followers of this school of thought; the smug, self-satisfaction with which they look down upon those whom they are pleased to call Philistines. But these extremes ought not to make us unjust to the true ideal, which might, I imagine, be stated some-

thing like this: from the root-meaning of the word we get the true conception that by the tilling, the cultivation of a field, all its powers, all its possibilities of fruitfulness and development are brought to realisation; so that the whole principle of culture might be expressed thus: we have our human heritage—the body, with its natural craving for meat and drink and rest and exercise, and its enjoyment in the use of all the senses; the mind, with its curiosity after truth and its joy in wrestling with work; the imagination, with its eager delight in beauty; the will, with its passion for domination and power; the heart, with its yearnings for love and friendship and the sweet intimacies of home.

Here is our heritage; what are we to do with it? The answer of the Greek was unhesitating and clear. The very

existence of an instinct or a faculty was enough to justify its satisfaction. In spite of the serious break-down of Greek thought in its practical application in the life of the nation, there is a side of our nature to which this conception most powerfully appeals; there is at first sight a sanity about it that seems its complete justification. Surely each man has the right to use, develop, and enjoy all those powers that God has given to him. But there have been ages in the world's history, there are moods in each man's life, when this ideal fails to satisfy, and so we find its complete opposite exercising its influence on the minds and lives of men.

The ascetic ideal. It has been held by many that religion means not the development, but the repression of all our natural instincts; that not to cultivate, but to

crucify oneself, is the road to perfection. It is of course especially interesting to those who have anything to do with India, that it is this aspect of religious living that appeals most to the thinkers of that great country. There is an old legend quoted in *Culture and Restraint*, which puts this in striking fashion: that when, centuries before Christ, the Buddhist missionaries went out two and two into the world to preach their gospel, two Indian friars burned themselves to death before the eyes of the wondering Athenians as a last desperate effort to present their doctrine of renunciation. This, then, is the other ideal, the ideal that has become symbolised and embodied in the Cross.

II. The Reconciliation of the Two Ideals in Christ

To the Corinthians there came, as there

comes to us, the necessity of reconciling these two apparently opposite ideals if they were to make the most of the life that God had given them. And St. Paul's teaching is as full of meaning and wisdom to us to-day as it was nearly two thousand years ago; it took, of course, the line specially suggested by their special circumstances and needs. He seems to have in mind two thoughts, which I will call the Cross as an example and the Cross as a mystery.

The Cross as an example. When Corinth was rebuilt after being razed to the ground by the Romans, immigrants, who were apparently freed slaves from Rome, were sent to colonise the place. The situation of the city as a seaport town, nay the very air and influences of Greece itself, tended to develop unduly the first of these two life ideals. A liberty that had

degenerated into licence had invaded the Church itself; there was a scandalous tendency to condone the grossest sin. Their life, as we see from this letter, was rich and full: they "came behind in no spiritual gift." But the ascetic ideal, foreign to the very air they breathed, had lost its right place in their lives. And the message they needed, and he gave, was Jesus Christ, and this Jesus crucified. He sums up his message as the message of the Cross. It becomes then necessary to inquire carefully what was the message of Jesus as to the place of the two ideals in the life of His followers, a message given not merely in His words, but in His life and death upon the Cross.

Though isolated sayings have been quoted to prove that He was an ascetic, He was not so, nor did He preach asceticism. The love of little children, the love

of home, the love of wife and family, the love of nature—all found their place in His conception of the spiritual life. There is a story quoted in *Culture and Restraint* of a mystic, who, on his walks abroad, used to pull his hat over his eyes lest the violets should distract his attention from communion with God. Contrast that with his Master, Who said, "Consider the lilies," and found "every common bush afire with God." He recognised the life of culture, the life of self-expression to the full. He would, we believe, have recommended the complete life with two qualifications. There are two things which may bid us mutilate our life, the call of prudence and the call of service.

The call of prudence. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having

two eyes to be cast into hell fire." As Bishop Gore paraphases it: "The safe life is better than the complete life;" in other words, nothing matters in comparison with the supreme importance of maintaining communion with God. If that can be maintained, as by countless gifted souls it can, in conjunction with the other, well; if not, cut it off and cast it from thee.

The call of service. It is clear from the life and words, both of St. Paul and his Master, that it may be incumbent on a man to limit and restrict his own individual life, to forgo his rights for the sake of the work he is called to do. The highest life that the world has ever seen was a life of voluntary limitation, not only in that "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross," but in that "He emptied Himself and

took upon Him the form of a servant." St. Paul's life, too, was full of the same voluntary forgoing, at the call of service, of the right to the complete life. "If others have a share in this authority over you, have not we still more?" But "we did not use this authority, nay we repress all things, lest we should give any obstacle to the Gospel of Christ." He deliberately forwent marriage, to which he had the right in common with the other Apostles.

St. Paul's message, then, to them and to us seems to be this: human powers were given to us for use, capacities for development, instincts for satisfaction; the ideal of culture is not in itself to be deprecated, but on each true Christian life must fall the shadow of the Cross. There is no general rule for its application: it would be much simpler and easier if

there were. But at the call of prudence and the call of service each Christian must in his own way take up the Cross.

The Cross as a mystery. The word itself is used in this passage, and it is the regular Pauline phrase for the idea running all through, namely something that cannot be discovered by the human intellect, but only by the revelation of God. As we should have expected from their environment, the Corinthians were inclined to attach great weight to knowledge, wisdom, subtlety of argument, brilliant and rhetorical presentation of truth; it was to the intellect that they gave their heartiest, most spontaneous admiration. The simple, or apparently simple, teaching of the Cross was to them foolishness. St. Paul reminds them of a fact that needs emphasis as much to-day as it needed it then; namely, that religious

truth is in one sense on a different plane from intellectual truth. It too is wisdom, "the wisdom of God in a mystery"; not to be unravelled by the scientific method of observation—"Eye hath not seen nor ear heard"—not to be discovered by the philosophic method of reasoning—"it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive"; but revealed by the Spirit to spiritual men. We cannot *understand* the Cross, but the conviction of its truth flashes on us as we kneel and pray. We *know* that for Jesus' sake, because of what He has done, we, even we, shall one day "stand faultless before the presence of the throne of His glory with exceeding joy."

IF THE RESURRECTION BE A GREAT DELUSION, WHAT THEN?

CHAPTER III

IF THE RESURRECTION BE A GREAT DELUSION, WHAT THEN ?

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable."—1 Cor. xv. 19.[1]

It would be quite easy to attach a meaning to this passage which would be inconsistent with the teaching of other parts of the Bible; so far as the words go, they might well mean this: that if the Resurrection were untrue, the *policy of the Christian life*—the policy of restraint, of self-denial, of patiently enduring

[1] In the Greek the word "only" comes at the end of the sentence, and should therefore qualify the whole, and not merely the words "in this life." This might be brought out by some such translation as this: "If in this life we have been hoping in Christ, and that is all, we are more to be pitied than all other men."

persecution even unto death—would be a mistaken policy; that if you take away the promise of the life the other side, the Christian life is a foolish kind of life. No thoughtful Christian would for a moment accept this as being true. We believe that, even from the point of view of this life, the Christian policy of living is wise. "Godliness," writes St. Paul elsewhere, "hath the promise of the life that now is as well as that which is to come." As Robertson of Brighton puts it in that noble and often-quoted sentence in one of his sermons: "Even if there be no God, and no hereafter, it is still better to be true than false, chaste than licentious, brave than a coward." If, then, the verse cannot mean this, what can it mean?

I would say first that, if the belief in a Resurrection be a delusion, the Christian

is to be pitied, because all delusion is pitiable. No matter how strong an inducement to right-living the delusion be, no matter how great the peace and comfort it pours into the soul, it is better to face facts, to see things as they really are, even if it breaks a man's heart. This statement might not win universal acceptance; some of our popular proverbs, which have been defined as "the wisdom of many and the wit of one," and therefore may be regarded as expressing the views of the majority, assert the contrary: "Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise." But George Eliot, in one of her letters, puts the matter more truly. She uses a very striking metaphor, when, writing from her own standpoint, she compares the soothing and anæsthetic effects of a belief in God and immortality to the effects of opium. "The highest

calling and election is to do without opium, and to face life with serene clear-eyed endurance." If you grant her premises, surely she is right; however ennobling, however comforting, however uplifting a delusion may be, truth is best. To be deluded is to be pitiable.

And we might perhaps express the meaning of this verse in some such way as this: that if there be no Resurrection the Christian is more to be pited than all other men, because the greatest trust on which man ever leaned would be shattered, and the greatest hope that ever brightened man's life would be destroyed.

I. Man's Greatest Trust

It has become, thank God, almost a commonplace to say that Christianity means Christ. I suppose the truth underlying all our theological dogmas about

faith, the essence of all those countless statements made by Christ Himself about the necessity of faith, the truth and the essence is just this: that Christianity means leaning upon the personal Christ as the drowning man leans upon the strong swimmer who is rescuing him, as the tempest-driven traveller leans against the rock to shelter him from the pitiless storm, as we lean upon a teacher to make us wise and on a doctor to make us whole. It has been the fashion of late to say that it does not matter what a man believes so long as he is sincere. But this statement really seems to mean, if you look into it, nothing at all. If there is no reality answering to my faith, I have indeed believed in vain. If the cork be taken out of the life-belt and the empty canvas shell thrown to the struggling swimmer, no trust in it, however

passionately sincere, can make it support the drowning man. If there be no reality in Christ answering to our faith in Him, we have believed in vain. And in these days of juggling with the articles of our faith, we cannot insist too strongly or too often on this: that if Christ be not risen—I would say it with all reverence—He has failed us. He is not what He claimed to be, an ever-living Friend, by our side through "all the days," the days of storm, the days of clear shining after rain, and the days of dull grey weather. If we have prayed for half a lifetime to One who cannot hear, if we have believed with all our heart in a Presence that was not there, if, in a word, we have tried to live the Christian life with reference to a living, glorified, ever-present Christ, and all the time He lies "where on His grave the Syrian

stars look down," we are more to be pitied than all other men, because a trust on the like of which man never leant before is a delusion and a lie.

II. Man's Brightest Hope

It would not, of course, be the least true to say that the Resurrection of Jesus gave the hope of another life to mankind. As Bishop Westcott pointed out, the translation that Christ brought "immortality" to light through the Gospel, is singularly unfortunate, because the statement is quite untrue. A belief in some kind of immortality is common apparently to all nations and almost all creeds, and the Jews, it seems, held such a circumstantial belief in the resurrection of the body, that it could be used as a parable by Ezekiel in the vision of "the valley of dry bones." But what the

Resurrection of Jesus did for us was this: it not only gave a certainty to our hope, which nothing else could give save the return of one from that bourne from whence hitherto no traveller had returned, but it gave a form and colour to that hope which has given a new significance to human life. Hungry with curiosity, as we naturally are about that life to which we are going, these accounts [1] of the forty days after the Resurrection, and of St. Paul's meeting with the Risen Master on the Damascus road are scanned eagerly for light as to what His Resurrection, which shall be ours, really means. And there seem to be two things which stand out with special prominence, two main elements in the hope that we owe to the Resurrection. It assures us of two things: the continuance of personal

[1] For this whole subject, *vide* Latham's *Risen Master*.

identity and the permanence of personal relationships.

The continuance of personal identity. I mean much more by this hope than the bare words seem to imply. Written over the whole wonderful series of narratives I read these words: "This same Jesus." This is all the more striking, because there were changes in the outward form of the Resurrection-body which at times sealed their eyes, so that for a time they did not know Him. Have you noticed how, as Latham points out, it was not the proffered proof of the touch of the hands and side that brought faith to doubting Thomas, but the familiar characteristic of his Master that he knew so well—that that Master could read his thoughts?

Have you noticed how, after that walk to Emmaus, it was something familiar in His manner as He blessed and brake

bread that reminded them of that Last Supper, so that He "was known to them in the breaking of bread"? Have you noticed in that meeting on the Damascus road how instinctively His thoughts find the old familiar form of expression, that of parable drawn from the common country life around, and how His words have the old familiar touch of the life of the Syrian fields: "It is hard for thee" (like the rebellious ox) "to kick against the goad"? Can there be any hope that meets more absolutely one of the deepest needs of our hearts? The haunting fear of bereavement is the fear of change, the feeling that, while the new life may hold much that is good, the old life that we loved has gone for ever, the personality, of which every smallest characteristic had grown dear to us, must have suffered change. "The same Jesus": death and

Resurrection no break in personal identity. A hope like this robs death of its sharpest sting.

The permanence of personal relationships. It is true that Christ's first act, on His rising again, was to dispel a false notion as to this point. His words, that sound like a harsh repulse of earthly affection, were really a reminder that a return to the old life did not exhaust the meaning of His victory over death. But, when once that had been made clear, all the rest of the forty days were a tender renewing and maintaining of the earlier links. It is surely significant that the only one to whom He appeared, who was not previously a believer in His divine claims, was one linked to Him by the human tie of brotherhood. John was still the disciple whom Jesus loved, Peter still in the inner circle of His friends.

Human links are not for time only, but for eternity; otherwise we should be right in saying, "Love not, love not; the thing you love shall die." It is only through faith in Christ's Resurrection, that a noble thought like that of a recent writer becomes possible: "One chief use of this life is to make friendships for eternity."

> "Fame is a fleeting breath,
> Hopes may be false or fond;
> Love shall endure till death,
> And perhaps beyond."

As we follow out a train of thought like this, we begin to understand just a very little of the wealth of our heritage in this faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, to feel that if He had not risen, if our trust and hope had been delusions, we had been indeed more to be pitied than all other men.

A TEST OF THE QUALITY OF WORK

CHAPTER IV

A TEST OF THE QUALITY OF WORK

"If any man build upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, thatch, reeds, the work of each man shall be made manifest; for the day shall make it clear, because it is unveiled by fire, and the fire shall test each man's work of what sort it is."—1 Cor. iii. 10–15.

Great emphasis is sometimes laid on the contrast between "being" and "doing," the individual spiritual life of the man and his work. And the tendency, I think, is to exalt the importance of being at the expense of the importance of working. But this needs careful statement if it is not to lead to misunderstanding. If the supreme and vital question about each man is how much he has contributed

to the life of "the body of Christ," then we may say that "being" is chiefly important because it is the most effective method of "doing." And the insistence on the supreme importance of the cultivation of the inner life of the individual really rests on this fact, that a man who spends much time and thought on the culture of his own spiritual life will, though probably unconsciously, do more effective work than he who, working more, prays less. The strongest advocate of the importance of "being" would, if pressed, be the last to make light of the necessity of working. And this is borne out by the fact that there is a universal human instinct that makes a man long for success in his work. This longing outlives the passionate youthful craving for happiness, which is also common to us all; and long after a man has realised that this world is not the place

of dreams materialised that he fondly hoped, he still longs that his work may *tell*, that he may not spend his strength for nought.

There are surely two kinds of ambition, the true and the false; ambition is only vulgar, if it be for some unworthy aim, for place or power or wealth or fame or —that dreadful clerical word—"preferment." Each man, in so far as he is a man, is bound to be ambitious for success; that is, that his work may *tell*.

But when we come to ask what constitutes success we find a bewildering number of standards to confuse us. I pass over without comment the world's standard, that a man's success is to be measured by the remuneration that he receives, or the splendour and dignity of the office that he wins. But there are other standards less obviously false than

this. A very common measure by which to gauge the value of a man's work is that of size, extensiveness—the number of readers that a book finds, the number of hearers that a preacher attracts, the greatness of the organisation that a leader originates and controls. Others, more plausibly, would weigh work not by extensiveness, but by intensiveness. The book, the sermon, the poem, the lecture that lays hold of some man's very soul, would seem to them the successful book or sermon; to them the mother who gives her life to stamp her individuality on her two or three children would seem the type of the successful worker. And this view wins some support from the fact that our Lord seems to have restricted the sphere of His work and to have spent most of His time in fashioning the character of His handful of immediate disciples.

Others would take permanence, others completeness as the standard; but while there is something to be said for all these views, St. Paul here propounds a test, by which the success of work will be tried, other than any of these. He says that the Advent, "the day," "the fire," will try every man's work of what sort it is.

I. The Metaphor here employed for Work

It is worth while to look for a moment at the metaphor here employed for work. St. Paul's writings are full of these germ-parables, and this letter is particularly rich in them. We have work pictured by the functions of the various members of the body, by the labour of the husbandman; and here we have a metaphor that has become part of human language and been used by more writers than we can

count, the metaphor of building. Just as one of our great English cathedrals has risen to its stately beauty by the toil not only of many men, but of many generations; and the work is never finally completed, because maintenance, adornment, and repair still call for fresh labour; so it is with the Church. It has been strengthened by the solid thought of theologian and philosopher, enriched by the jewel fancies of the artist and the poet, enlarged by the evangelist with his contribution of living stones, repaired by the prophet and reformer. And every Christian, no matter how humble his sphere, is adding something to that pile: perhaps not in every case by bringing fresh stones to the building, but by preparing the way for others to do so; by fashioning the stones already in their place, by love, by thought, by sacrifice,

by conserving and adapting the old, by contributing the new, we are each playing a part in the work, and still the raising of the Temple goes on. It is a noble metaphor for Christian work.

II. The Metaphor for the Testing of Work

This is suggested naturally enough by the picture of the town of Corinth that would be in St. Paul's mind as he wrote. In the year 146 B.C. the city was completely destroyed by the Roman General Mummius, who put it to the flames. For a hundred years it lay in ruins, and then a few years before St. Paul's time it was rebuilt. But the traces of the ordeal by fire through which the city had passed would still be visible enough. The massive blocks of stone and marble had stood the test, but the incongruous super-

structures built up upon them showed how much of the old city had simply been demolished by the flames. How much of the work of those early builders had simply passed away, leaving nothing but charred ashes to tell of what had been! It may be that the memory of the richer quarters of the town, where no wealth had been spared and gold and precious stones had been lavished, and of the dwellings of the poor where squalid superstructures of wood and thatch and mud and straw rose on some massive block of stone or marble, a relic of the past—it may be that these memories suggested the language here. At any rate, as he writes with this picture of the city before his mind, he thinks of this searching test of fire, through which the work of the builder had had to pass: "the fire shall test the work of each man of what sort

it is." If we have ever seen a great fire doing its work of destruction, it is difficult to imagine a more telling picture of a test of work than this: the light combustible thatch that goes first; the timber that resists longer, but goes with a crash too; the stucco that looked like stone to the inexpert eye, but is revealed now for what it really is; and only the stone and marble that remains in the end, gutted and stripped bare of all less solid than itself. So will it be with our work in the testing day.

III. St. Paul's Idea that Good Men may do Bad Work

A word needs to be said in passing about the startling idea suggested here. We are accustomed to the thought which may be expressed roughly by saying that bad men can do good work. The Old

Testament is full of the notion that God can and does take bad men and use them as the instruments of His will; here we have a suggestion more startling, namely that good men may do bad work, worthless work. I remember reading somewhere a phrase written by a great man at the end of a long life—a most despairing phrase: "I have spent the whole of my life *laboriously doing nothing at all*": "laboriously doing nothing at all": building structures that the first leaping flames of the testing time would destroy.

IV. The Application of the Test

Is it possible for us to apply this test here and now to our work, so that we may be sure that we are not spending our strength for nought? In one sense, no. The bridge cannot be really tested till the flood comes down from the hills;

the ship cannot finally be proved seaworthy till the storm strikes her. But just as the engineer, while he cannot apply the test of the flood till it comes, can and does go anxiously through pages and pages of calculations to see whether the bridge is constructed on right mathematical principles, so must we anxiously inquire whether our work is being done on such principles as will make it likely to stand the test of that day. One thought may be suggested here as a possible guide to our inquiry: there are two things of which the absolute permanence is asserted in the New Testament; the one is love and the other is law.

Of all the beautiful things St. Paul says about love, the one that he feels most deeply seems to be this, that love is admirable because it *lasts*: love never fails; prophecy, tongues, knowledge, all

pass; love abides. He, then, who has implanted one thought about God, which leads men to see the lovableness of God, he who has led men one step along the road to unity, concord, mutual love, has added something to the fabric of Christ's Church, which will stand the testing day.

There is one more thing of which the absolute permanence is asserted in the New Testament in the strongest terms. The Lord Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." The words of Jesus were the expression of the mind of God, those eternal principles which we sum up under the general title of "Law." Work, no matter how humble, how trivial, that is done in accordance with those principles, is work for eternity. This thought needs illustration. Bishop Westcott of Durham, in one of his last addresses, said these

words: "If I have failed . . . it has been because I have often not acted on the eternal law, that he who would help men must demand something of them." In another place the same writer suggests to us another great law: "The intrusion of self is the ruin of any great work." The New Testament is full of those eternal laws, those great principles on which work must be done. And even here and now we can test our work by them. It will be a humbling study. How often we shall have to say that this or that piece of work was worthless because in it I broke one of the laws of God: I let self come in, I ignored this or that element in human nature. How much will pass! May God in His infinite mercy grant that something may remain.

INDIFFERENCE TO AND SUSPENSION OF HUMAN JUDGMENT

CHAPTER V

INDIFFERENCE TO AND SUSPENSION OF HUMAN JUDGMENT

"To me it is a matter of supreme unimportance that I should be judged by you or by any human judgment" (literally "human day"); "but I do not even judge mine own self; for I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I am not by this justified; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord come, who shall both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and shall make manifest the counsels of the hearts."—1 Cor. iv. 3–5.

This letter seems to me one of the most human documents ever written. The situation was this: the Christians at Corinth were divided up into factions, each exalting some particular leader at the expense of the others. St. Paul with

his high birth, his gentle nurture, his great attainments, his wonderful gifts, found himself pilloried by a large section of the Church, his pretensions derided, his claims belittled, his leadership disowned, and his orders disobeyed. We are continually conscious in reading both the Letters to the Corinthians of this perfectly natural human soreness. We none of us like being depreciated and belittled, and the message of St. Paul speaks with all the more force because of this touch of human nature that makes him kin with ourselves. For in the passage quoted above we have the thought of one of his hours of insight, when he has risen right above it for a time, when he sees things as they really are, and for the moment is able to declare his complete indifference to the verdict of man's judgment.

I. Indifference to Human Judgment

"It is a matter of supreme unimportance that I should be judged by you or any human judgment." While such a statement moves our envy, while we are conscious of the glorious liberty of such independence, of the protection it would afford against the restless anxiety of the desire to please, and the pin-pricks and the sword-thrusts that wound our vanity or self-esteem—while we feel this, we also feel that there is something to be said on both sides of the question. It is absolutely natural to care what people think about us if we like them or love them, as St. Paul loved the Corinthians; and it is by no means the weakest or the worst people who care most. Many of us are beset at times by great waves of self-mistrust of our powers, our policy,

our effectiveness; and to have the hearty support of the approval of some one whom we love and trust seems often just to add the little bit of strength and confidence that we need. Of Charles Kingsley it was said that he made men good by believing them to be so. And it is not only natural: it may be a most powerful motive for righteousness. The fear of shattering the trust of some one who believed in them has kept more men straight than perhaps any other incentive to goodness. And yet there is a deep and real danger in depending on the judgment of others and allowing ourselves to be elated by their approval and depressed by their censure, for in so far as we do this we are substituting another's conscience for our own, and weakening our personality in something the same way as a man, who gets into the

habit of using a crutch, loses the power of walking alone.

Indifference, then, to the judgment of others about us means freedom and strength; but how did St. Paul attain it? He tells us expressly here. We know it was not from a natural callousness; no more delicately sensitive nature than his was ever exposed to the stings and pricks of life. Callousness is an evil because it inevitably makes men not only indifferent to the pain others inflict on them, but equally so to the pain they inflict on others; and no man was ever less callous than St. Paul. He expressly states here, too, that it was not a consciousness of personal rectitude that made him indifferent to the condemnation of others. It is true that he was not "conscious of anything against himself"; but knowing how incapable man is of an unbiassed

judgment of himself, he writes, "Yet am I not hereby justified." His independence comes from a strong consciousness that God is the only one who really matters: "He that judgeth me is the Lord." He here touches, surely, the very deepest root of the matter: the way to get a right attitude towards men's opinions is to practise getting right away into a region of consciousness, where one is only aware of two entities, God and the soul. Those moments of desperate loneliness, when men cry, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy," afford just that needed opportunity for staying the soul upon God. "We live alone, we suffer alone, we die alone, we inhabit the last resting-place alone; but there is nothing to prevent our opening our loneliness to God. And then what was austere monologue

becomes dialogue ; restlessness passes into peace. All is well ; my God envelops me" (Amiel's *Journal Intime*).

The second part of this passage deals with another thought, equally important, and equally perplexing, namely our duty as to the judgments that we form of others.

II. The Suspension of Human Judgment

" Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come." There is a sense in which this appeals to what we feel to be one of the weaker sides of our present-day thought, the tendency which bids us " Believe it not, reject it not, but wait it out, O man ! " But it cannot mean that we are to go through life with our minds, our opinions, in what Stevenson calls " a state of accurate balance and

blank," making up our minds about nothing, inclining neither to the one side nor the other. No man who has a mind at all can read the newspaper in the morning without forming certain judgments about things; for instance, about the truth or falsehood of certain claims made, the wisdom or unwisdom of a certain policy, the merit or demerit of certain actions. A man who in this sense kept always an open mind would end by having no mind to keep open; he would lose, that is, his faculty of judgment altogether.

But there is a kind of judgment to which we are fatally prone, and which is forbidden absolutely and altogether; namely, the judgment of human character, the pronouncing this or that man good or bad, honest or dishonest, noble or base. The command obviously needs to be interpreted by the aid of common sense. A

schoolmaster asked for a character of one of his boys; the mistress of a house questioned about one of her servants—these are bound to say honestly what they think. But the vast majority of judgments pronounced by men and women upon one another have no such justification; they are made merely to point an epigram, or wile away an idle hour, or gratify a spite. And even where such judgments have to be pronounced we are to remember their exceeding fallibility. And St. Paul gives us the reason here why such judgments are to be as far as possible withheld: they are quite premature. "Until the Lord come" we have not the data. "The hidden things of darkness" seem to be those parts of a man's life which he wilfully hides, and yet which must be known if the verdict is to be fair. How many men seem to

take a pride in concealing their better selves! "The counsels of the heart," apparently, are those things which in the very nature of the case cannot be known, namely the motives and purposes with which things are done. These things are inevitably concealed now, and yet, as we know from Christ's teaching, it is the motive that gives the real colour to any action. And so the Lord's command, "Judge not," is emphasised here by the Apostle, and we are further told to postpone all such judgments till the great day "of the unveiling." What does this unveiling of the great day mean? Not, I think, that all the details of our past life will be dragged out into the pitiless light of day—that is forgiven; and forgiven in God's language means forgotten—but that our real self, the sum of our past, will be stripped bare of all disguise, and shown

as it really is. Until that day of revealing we are as far as may be to suspend, reserve judgment as to human character, committing all to Him that judgeth righteously.

THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

CHAPTER VI

THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

"For just as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of the body being many are one body, so also is Christ."—1 Cor. xii. 12.

The discovery that society is an organism similar to the human body is no new idea, nor is it an exclusively Christian idea. It was used long before Christ in the fable of "The belly and the members" famous in Roman history. But the advances made in the knowledge of biology and sociology show us more and more how extraordinarily apt the comparison is. For there are two ideas that biology has brought out with increasing clearness, both of which are strongly emphasised in

the twelfth chapter of this letter. These are the nature of organic unity and the differentiation of functions or the division of labour. We are told that the more highly developed the organism is, the greater is its unity, and yet the more minute is the subdivision of its functions. We will deal in this chapter with St. Paul's conception of the unity, and in the next with his conception of the differentiation of functions as applied to the body of Christ.

We are told that in the lowest forms of life the means of communication between the various parts of the organism are so imperfect that, provided nuclear material be present in each piece, an organism, such as an amœba, can be cut in pieces without seriously interfering with its life and growth.

This is certainly so in primitive forms

of society. Take, for instance, the inhabitants of England in the earliest times. The lack of means of communication breaks up such a body into a large number of independent parts. There is no real unity; injury to one part does not injure the whole; advantage to one part does not advantage the whole. In India, before the construction of railways, it was no uncommon thing to find famine prevailing in one district, and in another, only thirty miles away, the most abundant plenty. In the most advanced forms of life, such as we see in the human body, on the other hand, the means of communication are so perfect between the different parts of the body that it becomes in the most complete sense one body. Pain or pleasure to one part are instantly transmitted to the whole. It is the same in the social and economic organism; com-

munication by means of road, rail, post, and telegraph is so perfect, the interdependence of the different parts is so complete, that a depression in one trade filters its way through the whole industrial structure—the body is one. This is the kind of unity that is asserted here by St. Paul of the body of Christ, the Christian Church ; it is organic unity.

There are, roughly speaking, two methods by which a number of men may be made one : there is the unity that is impelled from without, and the unity that grows from within.

Men may be united by an outside force drawing them or driving them together. Sometimes, if the outside influence be very strong, the unity will seem to be very real : for instance, a common danger has sometimes drawn the passengers on a ship so much together, that differ-

ences of rank, temperament, education, have all been for the time being swept away, and they have been made one by the peril shared. Of course the characteristic of this kind of unity is that it is merely temporary; the peril over, the passengers edge away from each other again, wondering how they can ever have drawn so close. We know, and we grieve to know, that the union of the Indian peoples under our rule is at present of this kind. If the strong hand of the British Government were withdrawn, that union would cease to be, just as, if you split the bag that holds the pound of shot, you make what seemed one whole into a thousand separate entities again.

Utterly unlike this is the unity that grows from within. The tree is one, because it draws its sap from one system of roots; the family is one, because its life

comes from a common stock; the body is one, because it is informed by a common life. Take away the life—our very word for death, "dissolution," shows it—and the different members of the body fall into disintegration once more, dust returns to dust; but while the life is there, the body is one.

There are two results said here to follow from this kind of unity. First it obliterates all minor differences. St. Paul states this in magnificent language: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." G. K. Chesterton gives us a definition of the democratic spirit, of which the drift is this, that by this spirit we realise how supremely unimportant are the things in which men differ and how supremely important the things in which they are alike. This

seems to be the thought in the mind of St. Paul: difference of race, difference of education, difference of birth, rank, breeding, and position are all as nothing in the thought of the common life shared by all. When we look away from this ideal to the present-day actual, and recall the cleavages, social, racial, sectarian, that divide us, it is some comfort to realise that St. Paul in his day was face to face with differences as great, that he had to fight as hard as we for that unity which he knew to be the mind of Christ; more especially can those racial distinctions, which make the problem of the Church so difficult in our Empire over seas, be paralleled by the problem of Jew and Gentile, to the solving of which he brought such magnificent faith and insight and courage.

The second result that follows from

this unity is what we should now call solidarity. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it." I suppose that not so very many years ago a statement like this would have been dismissed from the mind of the reader as idle rhetoric. For we have here an amazingly strong statement that the members of the Body of Christ, those who are baptized into His name, are one in such a sense that injury to one is injury to all, and advantage to one is advantage to all. Long before this letter was written Christ had made the same assertion about His own unity with His followers: "He that receiveth you receiveth Me"; he that feeds or clothes or visits or tends one of the least of these My little ones, feeds and clothes and tends Me; he that neglects the least,

neglects Me. We have an illustration of this solidarity in the highest form of human love, the love of a mother for her child. In the most literal sense, a mother feels an injury inflicted on her child to be an injury inflicted on herself, and kindness to him kindness to herself. Now here in this passage we have the further inevitable application of the same thought: if Christ is one with us in this sense, then, by virtue of our union with Him, we are one with each other; "through Him" is "the whole body fitly joined together"; injury to a part is injury to the whole. And this is not merely a picturesque way of describing what we commonly call sympathy; it is a statement, the strongest that we can conceive, of solidarity. And we are much more able to-day to grasp this idea intelligently than we should have been a few years ago.

It is true that our conception of one of the ways in which the human race is one has been weakened by further knowledge. It would seem that heredity is not so strong a force as we thought it to be. Apparently the transmission of "acquired characteristics" is not, at any rate, a particularly common occurrence; and where, for instance, a man, with an inherited tendency to drink, wins to virtue and self-control, he is much more likely to transmit the inherited vicious tendency than the acquired virtue to his children. This may seem at first sight to weaken the motive urging him to self-mastery for the sake of others. But, while we know that heredity is a weaker bond of union than we thought it to be, we have learnt that influence is a far stronger and more mysterious link between men than we could have

formerly conceived. We know, from the established facts of telepathy, that independently of the ordinary means of written or spoken word, thought and feeling can be transmitted, even unconsciously, across vast distances. It is no longer merely a beautiful figure of speech to say that if one member suffer, the whole body suffers with it; we begin to see how this may be literally true.

There are two thoughts suggested by this wonderful truth: it supplies inspiration not only for the life of the individual soul, but also for the work. What a wonderful dignity this idea gives to the lonely struggle of the individual soul! It is true that, from one point of view, we are each of us utterly alone. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy." And yet, if this statement

of St. Paul be true, our obscure struggles with temptation, our hard-won little victories, our grievous defeats are of moment to the whole body to which we belong. What a motive this supplies for fighting on, for struggling to improve the quality of our individual lives! "No man liveth to himself, and to himself no man dieth." And what inspiration this thought gives for our little bit of obscure work! As we deal with the individual in our study, as we visit the cottage in the parish, as we teach the tiny class in the village school, our work is universal in the most literal sense of the word. Our failure or success in this little bit of work, of which no one ever hears, matters to the whole Church. "For if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member be glorified, all the members rejoice with it."

THE DIFFERENTIATION OF FUNCTIONS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

CHAPTER VII

THE DIFFERENTIATION OF FUNCTIONS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

"For just as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of the body being many are one body, so also is Christ."—1 Cor. xii. 12.

We tried to show in the previous chapter how, the more highly developed the organism, the more perfect is its unity. But there is a truth supplementary to this which is quite equally important: the more highly developed the organism, the greater is its subdivision of functions. "The lowest forms of life have either no distinct organs or very few; but the higher we ascend in the scale of being,

the more numerous and the more distinctly differentiated are the organs." In the lowest forms one member discharges several functions, and the animal uses the same organ for locomotion as it uses for eating and digesting; in the higher there is a separate organ to perform each function. We know that this is true of society. In its primitive forms there is almost no differentiation of functions. The same man is priest, king, legislator, judge, and executive; each man supplies his own needs and is for himself farmer and craftsman. Then gradually, as civilisation advances, labour becomes more and more subdivided until we come to the amazing phenomena of modern industrial life, where, for instance, there are eighteen distinct processes in making a pin, twenty-one in making a needle, each performed many thousands

of times each day by a separate individual, who devotes his whole life to that one tiny portion of a productive process.

The present day is the age of specialisation, and St Paul's conception, as stated here, of divided labour in the Church of Christ is full of interest; and it is perhaps legitimate to wonder whether specialisation, which has achieved such wonderful results in other fields, might not be more extensively used in Christian work.

The origin of specialisation, as implied here, increases our sense of the importance of the whole subject: its origin is divine, since it arises from *differences of gift.* All these different gifts mentioned in this passage, comprising practically every possible qualification for every kind of Christian work—gifts of perception, gifts of expression, gifts of execution—all have one origin, the Spirit, who "distributes

to every man separately according to his pleasure." Putting it in the simplest way, we may say that God has recognised and ordained specialisation, because by His arrangement each man can do one thing much better than he can do other things. The analogy of the body helps us here. It is possible to perceive the shape and form of an object both by the eye and the hand ; but the perception conveyed by the eye is so much the clearer and more accurate, that it is obvious that the eye was intended for this kind of work.

There is a thought underlying the whole of this passage, which our own experience proves true, namely that, where there are differences of gift and consequently specialisation of work, there will be a tendency for men to belittle their own share of the common work, not in a

spirit of modesty, but in a spirit of covetousness: a tendency for the foot to say, "because I am not the hand, I am not of the body"; and the ear, "Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body." Instances of great men who have admired and longed for gifts other than their own will occur to every reader. General Wolff crying that he would rather have written Gray's Elegy than taken Quebec, Carlyle speaking of the bridge built by his mason-father and saying that a good building will last longer than most books, are cases illustrating this tendency of the human heart. While it may be only a generous admiration for other men's gifts and work, it may also be a dangerous tendency to belittle our own; and St. Paul's twofold answer to those in the Corinthian Church who were tempted by this feeling well repays study. He

says first that all the functions are necessary: it is not perhaps possible to say that all are equally necessary to the life of the body, but all are equally necessary to its complete life.

And if there are any degrees of necessariness in the matter, we must, says St. Paul, give first place to those functions which are most obscure and have least grace about them. We can instance perhaps in the work of the Church, the task of collecting money, of keeping accounts, the burden of organisation, the drudgery of teaching. But there is another reflection suggested by St. Paul's analogy of the body that is of great importance; namely this, that the highest development of the individual organ does not always coincide with the good of the body as a whole. We know, as a matter of fact, that, where the life of the body is in-

complete, that of the individual organ may be most perfect. In blindness, for instance, the sense of touch becomes abnormally acute, and in deafness the sense of sight grows phenomenally keen. From this surely the deduction may be made, that, since the good of the body as a whole is the consideration of paramount importance, it may be incumbent on individuals to continue in posts of work where their gifts do not perhaps reach their highest development.

Specialisation, or division of labour, is an inspiring theme; there is something in the fact of combined labour that appeals to a very deep and universal instinct of human nature. Selfish and individualistic from some points of view we may be, and yet there is something in us which makes us love to subordinate our own personality in combination with others.

No individual sport will ever really take the place of the great social games, cricket, football, and hockey, where a man plays not for himself but for his side. No one, who has ever experienced it, can forget the thrill of the combined effort in rowing, when the boat leaps forward at the beginning of the stroke. And, I suppose if we try to analyse it, that the charm lies here: that by combination we can take part in efforts and enterprises grotesquely impossible for our individual strength. Economists tell us that one of the great advantages of division of labour is that the services of "women, children, and weak men" can be utilised, each contributing their little quota of effort.

One longs that some writer of power would describe for us the joys of combination in work for Christ, such as we

get in some of our Mission Stations in India and in some large and well-worked parishes at home. The common life, to which each contributes and from which each draws; the combined worship and intercession, with its special promise of result; the careful subdivision of labour, each doing that in which he is most strong; the government—the holding of the helm of the ship—resting in the strong hand, guided by the calm brain of him best able to bear it; the special gift of the missioner finding full exercise; the lecturer, the accountant, the man of business, the preacher, the man of prayer, each spending most of his time in the work for which God has best fitted him. No room for petty jealousy or mean covetousness, because each man has his own gift and envies not his brother's. It is a moving theme.

But when all has been said that can be said—and it is much—about the inspiration of combined, divided labour, it remains true that this method of work has a danger of its own. It is the danger lest, occupied with a minute part, we should lose sight of the whole; busied over our own little bit, we should forget the ideal; concerned with the means, we should confound it with the end. We see this plainly enough in modern industry: the watchmaker, under modern conditions, who spends his whole life on some minute portion of a process in the making of watches, is obviously more in danger of doing his work mechanically, listlessly, uninterestedly, than the man who makes the whole watch from beginning to end with his own hands. Or, again, there is the other danger allied to this, the great danger of our modern life, which merits

far fuller treatment than it can receive here—the danger lest we mistake means for ends. We all know how easily the organisation of a parish, the perfection of method in an office, the games and examinations in a college or school may come to be regarded as ends in themselves rather than as only means to an end. It becomes, then, more than ever necessary under modern conditions of work to pause frequently to re-form our ideal, to look away to that "far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves," and to realise that our work and our lives are to be weighed by the extent to which in their tiny measure they are helping to bring about that end.

THE SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER OF THE EVENTS OF HUMAN LIFE

CHAPTER VIII

THE SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER OF THE EVENTS OF HUMAN LIFE

"All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea: and did all eat the same spiritual meat and drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ."—1 Cor. x. 1–5.

The wording seems too plain to admit of the possibility of misunderstanding. It is inconceivable that one writing when the two Christian Sacraments had been instituted for some years could use these phrases without some such meaning as this: that these Israelites, whom he is holding up as a warning to the Corinthians,

had had events in their lives answering to the Christian Sacraments; that is, that these events were not merely reminders or symbols of God's presence, but channels whereby God willed to convey Himself to men. We seem, then, here to have a statement of a very remarkable truth which for want of a better name I will call the Sacramental Character of the events of the Human Life.

There are probably few things more crushing, more paralysing to all effort, than the conviction, which seems to have forced itself on some minds, that life is a meaningless thing: I mean the conviction that men, with all their exquisite capacities for happiness and pain, their almost infinite possibilities of baseness and nobleness, are the prey of random forces, the sport of mighty but purposeless powers, the flotsam and jetsam of

chance. But it might be said that it is impossible for a man in these days to believe that. We know more than we ever knew before about the wide and orderly reign of law; caprice and chance have been almost eliminated from our scheme of the universe.

But when we turn to some of the men who hold most strongly that life is governed by law, we find a despair hardly less appalling than that of those who believe that we are at the mercy of resistless chance. It is true that we have no one to-day who would hold with Rousseau that barbarism is a better thing than civilisation, that knowledge has only corrupted us, and that all our so-called progress has been a movement backwards, since the days when man lived a naked savage in the woods. But we find haunting doubts as to what constitutes progress,

and as to whither the law, that we see governing human life, is leading us. There is an often-quoted passage in Huxley's writings which expresses strikingly this sense of despair: "I do not hesitate to express the opinion that, if progress is to bring no greater benefits to the masses of the people in the future than it has done in the past, I should hail the advent of some kindly comet, that would sweep the whole affair away, as a consummation devoutly to be wished." William Watson uses a touching incident to illustrate the same view. He tells the story of a mountain-climber who was overtaken by a mist on the summit and was frozen to death there. When he was found next morning, it was seen that he had scratched with a knife on the rock by which he was sitting these words: "It is cold, and clouds shut out the view."

"So mounts the child of ages of desire,
Man, up the steeps of thought;
But on the last lone height he sighs, 'Tis cold,
And clouds shut out the view.'"

It by no means follows that a belief in the reign of law can solve "the riddle of the painful earth."

It is a relief to turn from statements like this to the extraordinary thought of St. Paul. But it is important not to minimise the meaning: he does not only say that he finds God's face in Nature:

"I found Him in the flowering of His fields;
I saw Him in the shining of the stars."

He does not only say that he "found Him in His ways with men," that he had proved that the events of individual life are ordered with wise purpose and that "all things work together for good"; he does not only say that the course of the world is in His hand, and that events are

marching on in ordered sequence to an expected end; but he says that certain events in the life of the Israelites were sacraments—channels through which the highest of all gifts, union with and possession of God, were meant to be conveyed.

In order to make this point clear let us look a little more closely at the second of the two events mentioned here by St. Paul.

The Sacrament of a Retrieved Loss

As was natural in the case of a nation of freed slaves—with a noble ancestry indeed, but having had time to deteriorate under all the degrading influences of serfdom for four hundred years—the Israelites thought a great deal about the physical hardships that they had to endure. The milk and honey, with which the promised land was to flow, seem to

have played an important part in consoling them for the loss of the flesh-pots of Egypt. And when, in place of what they had lost, they found nothing but a rough, toilsome journey through the desert, and no sustenance but manna from heaven and the water struck from the rock, they murmured against the Lord and against Moses. And St. Paul tells us here that it was no ordinary folly of which they were guilty. In making light of what had been given them in place of what they had lost, they were rejecting what was meant to be a sacrament of union with God: "They drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that Rock was Christ; but with some of them God was not well pleased."

The thought suggested here is big with meaning for all time: God never takes away or withholds anything from us with-

out giving us something in its place. And too often what we have lost glows with the glory with which the Israelites invested their past luxuries in Egypt, while what has been given to us in its place seems cold poor fare, like the manna in the desert and the water from the rock. We ask for happiness and He gives us duty. He stills a music in your life, and in the aching silence you can only hear the cry of those whose need is greater than your own. We ask for love and He gives us chances of service. We ask for certainty about such fundamental things as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, and He gives us faith. Now it is not only true that, as the greater contains the less, so what God gives is better than what He takes away; that, as Carlyle says, "Blessedness is a greater thing than happiness"; that duty is

better than gratification; that on the path of duty "we shall find the stubborn thistles bursting into glossy purples which outredden all voluptuous garden roses"; that faith is a better thing than scientific certainty, because "by faith" alone, in all its multifarious forms, "man is saved." But St. Paul has here a deeper and more wonderful thought still in mind. George Macdonald writes somewhere that "God's gifts sometimes hurt us a little in the falling," and those gifts, St. Paul implies here, are sacraments, for with them God means to give us—Himself. We are allowed to see this sometimes with startling distinctness. Recently a doctor was telling me of a case which he had seen of a severe illness, which left life bare of all delight, but coincided with a change of character so great as to seem miraculous. The sufferer had been

a servant of God before, but in this sacrament of suffering had received Himself. I heard from a parish priest in England of one who on a bed of lifelong, hopeless sickness had to undergo at times hours of almost intolerable agony, and who told him in the simplest, most natural way imaginable that she used to pray that the pain might not pass, lest the sense of the wonderful sweetness of God's presence which He gave her with the pain should pass too. Do not let us then be too much afraid of the parts of life which hurt. Carlyle has a description somewhere of a sight that he had seen in Switzerland, a black storm-cloud blowing up and enveloping the mountain peak in dark eddying vapour; and when the storm had passed by, it seemed like a miracle, for the peak, that had been bare and dark, was virgin white, and flashing

back the glories of the sunshine, "for the vapour had held snow."

Let us beware then how we treat life as ground profane. It is a sanctuary, its events are sacraments; and though we may miss the gift as the Israelites did, in its hardest experiences God means to give us—Himself.

THE PILGRIM OF ETERNITY

CHAPTER IX

THE PILGRIM OF ETERNITY

"But this I say, brethren, that the time is short; it remaineth that those who have wives be as though they had none; and those that weep as though they wept not; and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and those who buy as though they possessed not; and they who use this world as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."—1 Cor. vii. 29–31.

Carlyle defines religion as a man's relationship to the unseen world; but this will really include two other factors: his relationship to his fellow-men, and to what we call life or circumstances. St. Paul's writings are full of teaching as to all these three; and in this Epistle we have some of his ideas as to what is to be the Christian's attitude towards the cir-

cumstances of life. In the previous chapter we have studied the amazing thought that those circumstances of life, that God directly sends, that are beyond our power to control, are sacraments by which God means to convey Himself to men. In the section from which the above quotation is taken St. Paul is thinking rather of those circumstances in life, that are to some extent at least in our own power: the question of choice between married or single life, social position—"bond or free"—religious sect—"circumcised or uncircumcised." Can we then draw out from this passage what were in St. Paul's view the principles that should govern our attitude towards these outward circumstances of our lives, circumstances that are to some extent at any rate our own making and that we could conceivably alter if we chose?

There is great need for clear teaching on this point, because we tend to attach tremendous importance to these outward circumstances, and very frequently seek for happiness or goodness by endeavouring to change them. How often men try to grow wealthy or to rise in the social scale with the idea that by changing their circumstances they will attain to some happiness or blessedness that they have not hitherto possessed! How much time we waste in dreaming as to how much happier and better we might be, if the circumstances of our life were different!

St. Paul's Corinthian converts had evidently been exercised by just these questionings, and had been writing to ask him about them, for he begins the chapter by saying, "About those things about which you wrote to me. . . ." They had been

wondering, whether it was best for the unmarried to marry; or, on the other hand, for those married to loose the marriage tie, especially whether a Christian married to a non-Christian ought to break the link; whether it was better for the uncircumcised to join a particular section of the Church by being circumcised; whether the slave ought not to regard his slavery as an insuperable barrier to the Christian life, and to know no rest till he had become free.

Widely different as are the surroundings in which we live, it ought to be possible to draw out those general principles which in St. Paul's view should govern our attitude towards these things.

I. The Supreme Unimportance of all External Circumstances

The first principle that emerges clearly

from a study of the section is that we attach far too much importance to the outward circumstances of our lives : they are, after all, supremely unimportant. The verses quoted at the head of this chapter are a statement of the thought that had come to St. Paul in one of those amazing hours of insight, one of those supreme moments of vision that mark the prophet. I imagine that the prophet is not a man who dwells continually on the Mount of Vision, but from his journeys thither he brings back those messages that show us life as it really is. St. Paul certainly knew what it was to be weighed down by outward adverse circumstances; he had his moods of deep depression ; and because he was so like us in this respect, I think such a message as that of these verses comes home to us with all the more power. For, for the moment, " he has

outsoared the shadow of our night," he sees things in the clear white light of eternity, and he brings back from the Mount of Vision this message, that none of these things matter at all: happiness or misery, home or loneliness, poverty or wealth. "The Christian is the Pilgrim of Eternity"; these things matter no more to him than the crowd or the scenery on the bank to the oarsman rowing a race, than the comfort or the discomfort of the journey to the traveller who is hastening home. These verses, when we feel their truth, are like a strong spiritual tonic clearing for the time our vision. Are the circumstances of our lives hard or cramping or lonely? What does it matter? These things are only for a little space, and then vanishing away. It is the Christian's equivalent to Shelley's thought, but on a far higher plane:

"It is the same; for be it joy or sorrow,
The path of its departure still is free."

It is a lesson we need to-day, as the Corinthians needed it nearly two thousand years ago: "The aids to noble life are all within." "The mind is its own place, and there can make of heaven a hell, of hell a heaven." "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing;" righteousness is everything: "the keeping of the commandments of God." "The fashion of this world passeth away;" that is, all these things belong merely to the outward accidents of life, not to its essence at all, and "the fashion of this world"—the mere outward shape of life—is a passing, temporary thing.

But mere stoical indifference does not exhaust the Christian's duty towards these things: there is clearly a second and higher principle in St. Paul's mind.

II. That even the most Unfavourable Circumstances may be turned into Opportunities for the Highest Service

There was a situation that must have been common enough in those days, than which it would be difficult to imagine anything more fatal to the religious life. In the Corinthian Church of that day there were evidently many men and women who had become Christians while their life-partner, husband or wife, remained a worshipper of many gods, or perhaps clung to that cynical unbelief in all faiths which characterised the cultivated men and women of that day, when, it has been said, "all religions were to the people equally true, to the philosopher equally false, and to the statesman equally useful." Here, surely, was a situation so

intolerable, that a tie strained by a difference so fundamental must be allowed to snap. It is very characteristic of St. Paul's whole attitude of mind as shown in this section that he says, "No": the tie was already formed, the obligation could not be shirked. "If any brother"—that is, a Christian—"have a wife that does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not send her away." But this is not all: the very circumstances, apparently so insuperably difficult, may be turned into an occasion for the highest service, for "How knowest thou, O wife, that thou mayest not save thy husband; and how knowest thou, O husband, that thou mayest not save thy wife?"

When we therefore find ourselves in circumstances of peculiar difficulty or painfulness, our first thought should not

be to run away and evade them if we can; not even to endure them patiently; still less to sigh feebly for something different; but to see first if by the alchemy of faith and prayer we cannot transform them.

The member of a family who does not "fit in" with the rest of the household, the professional or business man in surroundings where it is peculiarly difficult to be straight, can all find in this principle a guide to conduct.

III. That we should Hesitate to Multiply our Distractions

"He that is unmarried careth for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; and he that is married careth for the things of the world, how he may please his wife." It is neither necessary nor fair to interpret this as a statement of

universal application that the celibate is higher than the domestic life, or that the sweet ties of love and home are vexatious trifles diverting the mind of a man from what alone is of true importance. St. Paul's obvious preference for the celibate life was due, no doubt, partly to temperament, partly to the nature of his calling, and partly to the peculiar circumstances of the time: "I say that this is good for the present distress." But this fact should not make us blind to the extremely important general principle underlying his words, which may be stated roughly thus: "I would have you without anxious thoughtfulness." Every additional tie *may* be a distraction from the one thing needful, which is, to follow the Lord with an undistracted mind. The Greek word here is exceedingly picturesque; it means "without being dragged in different direc-

tions" by a multiplicity of ties and interests. And after all, this principle did not originate with St. Paul: it came from his Master. All the Beatitudes, which at first strike strangely on our ear, really pronounce happy that citizen of the Kingdom who "goes without." We might paraphrase the old familiar words thus: Happy are those without riches, without popularity, without earthly joy, without assumption of personal dignity or insistence on personal rights. Not for one moment that these are not all good things, but simply that they may be *distracting*.

The application of this principle to the individual must and can only be made by the individual himself or herself before God. But in all the planning of our lives it at least should not be forgotten. It should form part of the data on which we

make our plans, if, for instance, we are seeking wealth or high office or place or power or social eminence or a beautiful and costly home.

St. Paul's ambition for his converts was that they should be without anxious thoughtfulness, without cares that might call them off from "looking away unto Jesus."

THE MIND OF THE MASTER-BUILDER

CHAPTER X

THE MIND OF THE MASTER-BUILDER

It is not very easy to sum up in a few pages the impressions of the character of the man and the principles of the missionary left by a careful reading of this wonderful letter, wonderful in being at once so human and so divine. Can we state concisely our view of the mind of the Master-Builder as revealed to us here ?

I. The Human Sensitiveness of the Man

Perhaps the impression left most deeply and permanently on our minds is that of the human sensitiveness of the man.

Here was no thick-skinned fighter dealing and receiving hard blows with a callous cheerfulness. Here was a man who cared intensely what others thought of him, who longed pathetically to be understood, who winced under spite, detraction, and misinterpretation, a man with the soul of a poet—was there ever a more beautiful prose poem penned than the thirteenth chapter of this letter ?—the natural fastidiousness of the aristocrat, the exclusiveness of the scholar.

And when we pause and recall the story of his life, we realise that in the nature of the man and the character of his environment we have the elements of a potential tragedy. Hunger, thirst, vigils, journeyings, the indignity of bodily suffering at the hands of brutal men and more brutal laws, a wearing disease that never left him, all those physical ills which mean

much to a man highly strung; misunderstanding, misinterpretation, envy, malice: all those mental ills which mean so much more; this was the life of St. Paul. And when we realise, as we do from the letters, the human soreness of the man at the treatment he received, the torturing anxieties of the care of all the churches, the fears insistent, the hopes deferred, it is borne in upon us that his was a life of great suffering. Here was no teacher "who points the steep and thorny way to heaven," while he himself "the primrose path of dalliance treads." Here was no carpet-knight, but one who down in the thickest press of the fight was pierced with a thousand wounds, because he was unprotected by a satisfied self-love or the armour of an unimaginative soul.

And the reflections that arise from this are two:

First, this suffering *had to be*. Only what costs counts; sensitiveness is the price of the gift of sympathy. Was there ever another follower of the Master who had so great a wealth of the Master's human sympathy? "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not?"

And secondly, this "weakness" was not only, as it were, the necessary defect of a quality, the unfortunate but inevitable correlative of his faculty of sympathy; this very "weakness" was his "strength." "When I am weak then am I strong." St. Paul apparently exulted in his own weakness, because it simply drove him to Christ. "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." There is a story told of the great founder of the China Inland

Mission which illustrates this idea. When asked if he did not feel exultant at what God had done through him, he answered that God had searched, as it were, for an instrument weak enough for His purpose; and when He found him had said: "This man will serve; he is weak enough." Every one who has been forced to fall back upon the power of Christ through the sense of his own utter helplessness will in some measure understand what he meant.

II. The Extremism of the Teacher

I remember reading somewhere a sentence that struck me profoundly. The drift of it was this: What we want is not less extremes, but more; only the extremist must be *extreme all round.* This thought merits much fuller treatment than it can receive here, but it can at

least be strikingly illustrated from the mind and methods of St. Paul. It might be said roughly that there are two schools of thought in the Church, the one laying the greater stress on the life of the individual soul, the other on the needs and claims of the whole body of Christ. It would not be difficult to prove from his writings that St. Paul was an extremist of both schools. What writer has ever laid more emphasis on the imperative need of the access of the individual soul to God? What passage could be cited from the whole range of literature stating more strikingly and absolutely than the twelfth chapter of this letter, that the claims of "the body" are paramount, and that each Christian must develop his own soul-life to the full, in order that he may contribute most to the life of the whole.

III. His Insistence and Dependence on Dogma

We live in an age when it has become the fashion to decry dogma, the definite and clear enunciation of religious truth. One writer, representative of this school, wrote some years ago: "The age of the preachers is passing; the force of things is against *the certain people*." No doubt there has been at times a misuse of dogma, a tendency to trust too confidently in the infallibility of certain attempts to express what is, after all, in a deep and true sense inexpressible in human speech and incomprehensible by human intellect. But yet, on dogma the faith rests still, on certain broad facts about Jesus the Christ is founded our hope for time and eternity: that creed has still its ancient power. I shall never forget an incident in

one of our village communities of Christians in India. It is Easter Day, and an old Christian woman, almost illiterate and very poor, has just laid to rest her only daughter, the staff and prop of her old age; and, as she stumbles, half-blinded by tears to the grave-side, her lips move, and you can just catch these softly whispered words: "Good-bye, my daughter, I shall see thee again; for this reason, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead."

On these great facts about Christ St. Paul too rested; they met his need in all the crises of the personal and the apostolic life; they held the key to all life's otherwise insoluble enigmas. Was he oppressed by the thought of sin and death reigning apparently unchecked in this world of men? The "second Adam," the type and representative of restored humanity, Jesus

Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, treading the path on which in St. Paul's view all men might follow in His steps, solved the riddle of human destiny. Was his work misjudged and belittled? He turned for comfort to the day of Christ's return, when in the light of His presence all things shall be naked and open, and shams and shows for ever stripped bare. Were his motives misinterpreted and his personal character derided and defamed? In his moments of insight he could reck little of the judgment of this "human day." Christ was coming back, and He would "bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the heart." Was life hard and toilsome and empty of human joy? He stayed himself on that great doctrine of the Providence of God, about which he has perhaps taught us more than any other

writer. Life has a meaning; suffering is the price of character; "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of joy."

Christ as the Creator of this world of ours; Christ born, dying, rising again to save it; Christ reigning in heaven and returning to bring about "that far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves"; Christ was the creed of Paul.

"Yea, through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning,
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed;
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning;
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

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